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# Hope Abjuring Hope

## On the Place of Utopia in Realist Political Theory

Forthcoming in *Political Theory*

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I don't think we're ever going to get to utopia again by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways. [...] Increasingly often in these increasingly hard times I am asked by people I respect and admire, "Are you going to write books about the terrible injustice and misery of our world, or are you going to write escapist and consolatory fantasies?" [...] I am offered the Grand Inquisitor's choice. Will you choose freedom without happiness, or happiness without freedom? The only answer one can make, I think is: No.

*Ursula K. Le Guin*<sup>1</sup>

[Utopias] don't speak to us trapped in this world as we are. [...] Must redefine utopia. It isn't the perfect end-product of our wishes, define it so and it deserves the scorn of those who sneer when they hear the word. No. Utopia is the process of making a better world, the name for one path history can take, a dynamic, tumultuous, agonizing process, with no end. Struggle forever.

*Kim Stanley Robinson*<sup>2</sup>

A start for any habitable utopia must be to overturn the ideological bullshit of empire and, unsentimentally but respectfully, to revisit the traduced and defamed cultures on the bones of which some conqueror's utopian dreams were piled up.

*China Miéville*<sup>3</sup>

### I. An Old Problem in Need of a New Articulation

Is a realist orientation in political theory compatible with an interest in, or even an endorsement of, utopianism? This paper tries to answer affirmatively, by complicating the conventional picture of the relationship between realism and utopia.

The main argument I shall put forth is that, once we re-consider what realism is and what utopia is, we are in a position to conceive of their relationship in a mutually supportive, rather than reciprocally exclusive fashion. Distilled into an aphorism, we might express the underlying intuition like this: realism without utopia is status-quo-affirming; utopia without realism is wishful thinking.

The paper thus interrogates the widely promoted identification of realism with anti-utopianism, and thereby discloses one possible way to deflect the charge of conservatism, which has frequently been levelled against realists of all stripes. To establish this argument, the essay steers attention to utopian fiction and introduces a reading of Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*. Rather than focussing on the narrative content alone, the gist of this reading is to foreground the potential of literature to imaginatively expand the range of questions we ask in political theory. My ambition in the following is therefore to motivate the proposition that the genre of critical and antinomian utopias can productively unsettle the controversies in political theory.<sup>4</sup>

Before elaborating on the substantive argument, a clarification on the paper's goal is required. In my turn to Le Guin's work, I pursue an ulterior motive, namely to outline ways in which the controversy between realists and moralists in political theory can move beyond a mere *Methodenstreit*.<sup>5</sup> Part of the reason why the current debate has gravitated towards methodological issues concerning "how to do political theory" can be found in the lamentable fact that conceptual confusion surrounds almost all the terms of the debate.

Nevertheless, I will in the following not aspire to elucidate what realism or utopia "actually mean". Although there is merit in such an exercise of semantic investigation,

the paper seeks to establish that utopianism is short-changed when it is equated with wishful thinking alone; and that a denunciation of utopian thinking as wishful thinking has significant implications for our appreciation of realism's potential to call for radical transformation. The essay therefore unravels the intricacies of utopianism through the lens of literary fiction, without pretending to resolve an ongoing controversy that will perhaps forever elude conclusive settlement. After all, ever since Thomas More coined the word "utopia" more than 500 years ago, its meaning has been deliberately exposed to conflicting interpretations, denoting at the same time a nowhere/no-place (*ou-topia*) and a virtuous, prosperous, Arcadian place (*eu-topia*).<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging the internal complexity of utopianism allows for a much-needed re-negotiation of the ostensible dichotomy between realism and utopia.<sup>7</sup>

Since the paper uncovers one possible path towards overcoming realism's narrow fixation on methodological issues, a further caveat seems necessary: by concentrating on the interconnections between literature and political theory, I will exclude from my inquiry the third dimension of utopianism, namely various forms of lived experience that draw on the utopian imagination.<sup>8</sup>

The plan for the paper is as follows: section II's starting point is that the tension between realism and utopia cannot be defused by stipulating a harmonious compatibility between both poles; neither is it the case, however, that realism and utopian thinking are antipodes that define each other in their absolute opposition. Instead, the most auspicious way of conceiving the relationship between realism and utopia reveals itself once we shun both problematic reconciliations, like the proposal for a "real utopia" (Erik Olin Wright *et al*), and problematic oppositions, such as "dystopic liberalism" (Judith Shklar *et al*).

In section III, I grapple with Raymond Geuss's efforts to locate the place of utopia in realist political theory, by drawing specifically on Theodor W. Adorno's and Gustav Landauer's writings. Building on insights from utopian studies, I then contend that viewing utopia as a persistent, iconoclastic form of "looking for the blue", rather than as a static blueprint for a perfect society, can assist us in fleshing out Geuss's reflections.

The subsequent section IV embarks on a reading of Ursula K. Le Guin's science fiction novel *The Dispossessed*. This text delivers an effective illustration of a different kind of utopianism that is compatible with realism: in depicting an anarchist experiment in a reflective, dynamic and ambiguous manner, Le Guin succeeds in conjuring a critical utopia that rejects the status quo without aiming to construct a perfect society.

The paper's final section V brings this interpretation of *The Dispossessed* to bear on the wider discussion in political theory and investigates utopianism's deployment of cognitive estrangement. I maintain that realist political theorists can accrue considerable benefits from taking narratives of radically different worlds seriously: they break the spell of the here and now, and thereby throw the existing power structures and ideological formations into sharper relief. Utopian fiction, in short, can be useful for comprehending "what is" (thus helping us to soberly understand the world we currently inhabit) and for meditating on "what might be" (thus helping us to nurture the hope for a better future). It is in the interplay between these two modes of critical reflection that its value for political theory lies.

## II. Two Problematic Solutions: “Real Utopias” and “Dystopic Liberalism”

The past 10 years have seen increased attention to realism as an intellectual project, which challenges the prevalent “ethics first” conception of political theory.<sup>9</sup> Realism within political theory is often thought to be antithetical to utopianism for at least two interrelated reasons. William Galston recapitulates these effectively when he highlights why realists should be considered “resolutely anti-utopian”<sup>10</sup>. On the one hand, realists are sceptical of the idea of linear, uninterrupted progress and thus distrustful of any programme for social change that discounts the high costs arising from political transformations. This is anti-utopianism in the guise of a pessimist attitude about the human capacity for peaceful coexistence and steady development. Given the permanence of conflict and strife, realists repudiate any appeal to pure consensus and agreement as wishful thinking.

On the other hand, realism can be said to oppose utopianism because of its disregard for concerns with feasibility. Building castles in the sky is inadequate when we contemplate how to improve the world as it is. The sheer distance between the ideals of utopia and the dire state of the here and now undermines the actual impact that social criticism needs to have. This occasions the common complaint that utopianism is problematic because its proposals to transform the status quo are simply unworkable. Demanding the impossible is, on this view, an idle posture that smacks of self-indulgence. Rather than conjuring up blueprints for perfect societies, we should concern ourselves with tailoring solutions for specific situations at specific moments in time. In conjunction, the worries about the human capacity for peaceful coexistence

and steady development and the insistence on feasibility constraints form the structural backbone of realism's putative aversion to utopia.

Needless to say, there has been a lot of push-back against both claims. Accordingly, realists have been accused of standing in the way of progressive change by exhibiting acute "utopophobia"<sup>11</sup>. Others have maintained that realists are simply wrong to assume that political theory should be concerned with guiding action in the first place. Factoring in questions about motivation would beget a deplorably "cynical realism"<sup>12</sup> that takes too much for granted.

Against this backdrop, let us now look further into two attempts to re-articulate the tension between realism and utopianism. I shall start with the notion that realism and utopianism can be harmoniously merged, a corollary of which seems to be that the narrative above is overdrawn. Perhaps the most developed proposal to this effect can be found in Erik Olin Wright's *Real Utopias Project*.<sup>13</sup> In collaboration with a group of political economists and philosophers over the past 20 years, Wright has endeavoured to recuperate emancipatory practices and institutions from within the capitalist system. The underlying research agenda affirms the

tension between dreams and practice. It is grounded in the belief that what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions. [...] What we need, then, is "real utopias": utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible waystations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change.<sup>14</sup>

Wright and his associates embrace the concept of a "real utopia" in order to explore the potential of actually existing practices and institutions to embody ideals of emancipation.<sup>15</sup> Examples of what they deem real utopias comprise worker

cooperatives, such as the Mondragón Corporation in the Basque country, participatory budgeting in the Global South or proposals for a Universal Basic Income. The *Real Utopias Project* appears to be animated by a yearning for reconciliation, for its “point is to sustain our deepest aspirations for a just and humane world that does not exist, while also pursuing the practical task of building real-world alternatives”<sup>16</sup>. Thus, Wright’s plea for “real utopianism” is driven by a desire to galvanize progressive action in a world that bears the hallmarks of injustices and exclusions. Wright’s thoughts on the astonishing recalcitrance of capitalism and the dire prospects of revolutionary action are symptomatic of this desire: transformation can only occur if progressive actors creatively combine anarchist (“interstitial”) with social-democratic (“symbiotic”) techniques of upsetting capitalism.<sup>17</sup> Capitalism is so deeply entrenched that nothing can seriously jeopardize its stability. Revolutionary action, which Wright associates with “ruptural” transformation, is bound to failure due to the fixity of the state apparatuses protecting the current order. Real utopias, however, manage to demonstrate that the hope for a different future can be kept alive, even if the option of a radical break with the status quo needs to be abandoned, or at least suspended for the time being. These initiatives aim to prove that “another world is possible”, to cite the evocative and powerful slogan of the World Social Forum.<sup>18</sup> At their heart lies a belief in the force of prefigurative politics, which is also central to anarchist movements.<sup>19</sup>

Let us juxtapose the attempted settlement between realism and utopia with another reading that starts from opposing premises. Judith Shklar, who has inspired a great many contemporary realists, delivered one of the most vociferous indictments against utopianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>20</sup> Her main objection to utopianism has also been



shared by several writers who have been collectively labelled – perhaps a bit heavily-handedly, but nonetheless accurately – “Cold War liberals”<sup>21</sup>. Philosophers and historians such as Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper and Raymond Aron expressed a profound discontent with the adverse effects that designs for a perfect and static society can have on human freedom and pluralism. Shklar’s plea for a “liberalism of fear”, whose main characteristic lies in avoiding the “summum malum”<sup>22</sup> of cruelty, underwrites this anti-utopianism. Utopian thinking, with its promise of future redemption, is a form of ideological extremism that needs to be contained by bearing witness to, and actively remembering, historical instances of evil. George Kateb captures this position when he writes that

[t]he lessons of the past must be kept to mind because they chasten hope; they reduce expectation concerning the possibility of reaching an ideal society. [...] To hope too much is to be guilty of forgetting the unspeakable, which happened in our lifetime, and will undoubtedly happen again, if it is not already taking place somewhere or other.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to stress yet another factor that shaped the Cold War liberals’ aversion to utopianism: their fierce anti-communism. While Shklar, Berlin, Popper and Aron were, of course, primarily concerned with the epochal evil of Nazism, another incentive was their hostility to socialist ideas.<sup>24</sup> Communism was charged with annihilating human freedom and pluralism by subjecting individuals to unfettered state control. Within oppressive structures, the anti-totalitarian argument goes, utopias play an instrumental role: they legitimize the severe hardship that collectives need to endure to rid themselves of injustices and exclusions.<sup>25</sup> On this view, an intrinsic bond ties together utopianism and large-scale, eliminatory violence.<sup>26</sup>

The systematic “preoccupation with political evil”<sup>27</sup> has a further ramification: Despite their suspicion of utopianism in all its manifestations, Shklar *et al* were

convinced that fictional depictions of evil may serve an important goal – they caution people about the grave perils of social engineering.<sup>28</sup> Dystopias cover “feasible negative visions of social and political development, cast principally in fictional form”<sup>29</sup>; as such, they are supremely suited to bolster the liberalism of fear. Many contemporary realists have been swayed by this fatalistic way of conceiving utopia.<sup>30</sup> While the ensuing discussion deviates from both the conciliatory and the antagonistic reading of the relationship between realism and utopianism, I do not mean to insinuate that there is nothing we could learn from them. Wright’s attempt at fusing realism and utopianism has been so inspirational because it rightly underscores the transformational effects that progressive social experiments, enacted both within and at the margins of the current hegemonic order, can have in the here and now. Similarly, Shklar’s admonition that utopia’s seductive aura can be evoked to incite violence reminds us that utopian thinking is far from innocuous; it remains a dangerous and risky enterprise.

However, both Wright *et al* and Sklar *et al* ultimately misconstrue the relationship between realism and utopianism. The first, conciliatory interpretation suffers from an excessive confidence in the resources of the hegemonic order to better itself. Although Wright, and those working on similar projects, insist on the continuous strain between the ideal and the mundane, one cannot escape the impression that, in their ameliorative endeavour, too much concession is being made to what is feasible in the world as we know it. Recall how Wright’s focus on the piecemeal manner in which utopian ideals need to be implemented is tethered to a prior appraisal of “viable alternatives”: without it, utopian thinking would degenerate into immature hypothesizing. Yet, this framing in terms of viability too readily accepts the

constraints set by current configurations of power. It truncates the utopian impulse. This becomes evident in Wright's bleak outlook on system-wide transformation. Given the overall resilience of capitalism, it would be hubristic to militate for social change based on "rupturing" the present state of affairs. In the end, "real utopias" are therefore predicated on accepting the deferral of radical change.<sup>31</sup> Call this conservative bent the core of the Wright *et al* misconception.

The second, antagonistic interpretation suffers from a different flaw: it abridges the internal diversity of utopianism by viewing it exclusively through the prism of anti-totalitarianism. Due to their running together of utopian thinking with social engineering, Shklar *et al* tend to unduly stress the dangers and risks characteristic of utopias, without granting the possibility that utopias might serve other, perhaps more salutary purposes than conveying schematic blueprints for upending society as a whole. What is more, the perspective of dystopic liberalism remains permeated by an anti-communist animus, weaving together utopianism, state control and destructive violence. For Cold War liberals, social engineering is the prerogative of the totalitarian states that have eviscerated individual liberties in the recent past. But note that such a disparaging assessment of utopianism is contingent on wilfully ignoring how capitalism and liberalism, too, mobilize social engineering for their projects, albeit in surreptitious ways that are difficult to unpick through an anti-totalitarian framework. In that sense, Shklar *et al* are, despite their credentials as precursors of contemporary realism, guilty of violating an incontrovertible requisite of realist political theory: that of reckoning with the world as it actually is, and not as we would want it to be. Polemically put, dystopic liberalism's account of human action itself looks like the result of wishful thinking. The notion that realism and utopianism are polar opposites

is therefore plausible only if we subscribe to the one-sided – and unrealistic – story that the Cold War liberals sought to propagate.<sup>32</sup> That is the crux of the Shklar *et al* misconception.

### III. The Real Place of Utopia: Antinomian and Critical

In contradistinction with these two readings, I now want to gesture towards an alternative interpretation that paves the way for a more convincing approach to the problem. The chief claim here is that no necessary link exists between realism and anti-utopianism. On this view, realism, properly understood, occupies an often overlooked space, whose boundaries still need mapping: between wishful thinking and hopeless pessimism.<sup>33</sup>

Raymond Geuss has taken decisive steps towards this interpretation. Although he probed the ramifications of a negative dialectics for utopianism in his earlier work, asserting with Adorno that a “prohibition forbids one to elaborate a positive image of utopia”<sup>34</sup>, these scattered remarks on the negativity of utopia never amounted to more than a tangential treatment.<sup>35</sup> In a number of recent writings, however, Geuss seeks to systematically distinguish sound utopianism from other, deficient forms of reasoning about politics.

He starts by declaring “wishful thinking” an illusion that remains alien to realism’s primary concern with understanding and assessing concrete power configurations and ideological formations.<sup>36</sup> Are we then to gather that all kinds of utopian imagining are intrinsically prone to succumbing to “Platonic optimism”? What makes Geuss’s approach so appealing is his assertion that we need a differentiated account of the various roles of wishing in politics. To wish for something, understood here broadly as the imaginative anticipation of an alternative future, is a basic human desire that

can either engender destructive self-delusion or productive self-empowerment. As a consequence, not all forms of wishing are deleterious from the point of view of realist political theory because what

we in hindsight call “reality” was in the past often a highly indefinite future [...]. Those who argue against wishful thinking do not after all necessarily want to abolish or restrict wishes themselves. Someone who takes into account the world we live in with a sober eye might still without difficulty also harbour “utopian” wishes, that is, wishes he knows are not to be realized.<sup>37</sup>

Against this backdrop, Geuss proceeds to distinguish more sharply between two varieties of utopianism: one that employs wishful thinking and thus remains at odds with a realist orientation in political theory; and one that facilitates the coherent articulation of demands for radical transformation, which is entirely in line with realism’s emancipatory agenda.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, just like his intellectual bugbear, John Rawls, Geuss turns to E. H. Carr to investigate the relationship between realism and utopian thinking in earnest.<sup>39</sup> The overall aim here is to accurately identify the place of the imagination, and especially of utopian thinking, within realism. His more specific goal is twofold: firstly, to demonstrate Carr’s object of rebuke was moralism, rather than utopianism; and, secondly, that it is conceivable to salvage a meaning of utopia that would not fall prey to the dangerous misapprehension of “wishful thinking”. Let us scrutinize more closely the second of these claims.

The standard realist critique of utopian thinking, as remarked above, is based on the assumption that utopias envision perfect states of social order and permanent peace, but fall short of specifying how one would have to proceed to reach those points in history without obliterating human freedom and pluralism. This orientation towards an unambiguously good goal makes them convenient vehicles for totalitarian domination: the preoccupation with a future telos can easily be invoked to vindicate

all kinds of sacrifice that would have to be made to finally attain redemption. Change through contestation, conflict and dissent is then entirely absent from traditional utopias.

Utopian thinking of this kind is, in Geuss's slightly idiosyncratic terminology, "form-based"<sup>40</sup> in that it exclusively concentrates on delineating a formal outline of a better future. The grave error in this view of utopia as a blueprint for a just society is that it naively assumes its self-realizing power. Aligning himself with Marx and Engels, who derided utopian socialists like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen for discarding the necessity of revolutionary action, Geuss maintains it is a sure sign of wishful thinking to presume "that it is 'enough' for a certain state of affairs to be *seen to be good*, for people to aspire to realise it"<sup>41</sup>.

Geuss juxtaposes this conventional view with another way of reflecting on utopia that is geared towards a contextual analysis of the social world as we know it. Epitomized by the work of German anarchist Gustav Landauer, this "content-based" version envisages "the task of utopian speculation as *not* to construct the image of a possible perfect world but as a focused study of those human desires and needs that continue to torment us but are incapable of being satisfied under present social circumstances"<sup>42</sup>. On this account, what matters is not so much the end state which utopian thinking summons, but rather "a more historically informed analysis of existing, but changing, dissatisfactions and needs, and possible (contextually and historically specific) ways of satisfying them"<sup>43</sup>. Despite being rooted in the real world, this perspective departs from Wright's ameliorative endeavour in that it does not deem the prevailing order's array of possibilities worth extending.

Geuss thus objects to form-based utopianism because it reifies the satisfaction of human “desires, needs and aspirations” by constructing a perfect world. Utopianism of this variety prompts a-historical wishful thinking, which contravenes the main thrust of realism. The reference to Landauer’s distinction between two kinds of historical force, *topia* (the here and now) and *utopia* (the vision of an alternative world), then helps clarify how Geuss conceives of “content-based” utopianism. Landauer himself outlines the distinction in the following words:

Topia is responsible for affluence and satiation as well as for hunger, for shelter as well as for homelessness. Topia organizes all matters of communality, wages war, exports and imports, closes and opens borders. [...] Topia’s relative stability gradually changes until a point of labile balance is reached. The changes in topia are caused by *utopia*. [...] Utopia means a combination of individual and heterogeneous manifestations of will that unite and organize in a moment of crisis to form a passionate demand for a new social form: a topia without ills and injustices. [...] Utopia is a combination of ambitions that will never reach their goals; they will always create but a new topia.<sup>44</sup>

The constant battle between *topia* and *utopia* explains how utopianism can be worked out in such a way as to avoid a-historical wishful thinking. Geuss proposes that “at any given time a given population will have (various) conceptions of what is harmful or unjust and these changing conceptions provide the kernel of utopian aspiration. The state of affairs intended in these utopian strivings will not ever be fully realised, and so their significance consists simply in driving Humanity on from one Topia [...] to the next”<sup>45</sup>.

Hence, utopias are contextually specific forms of critique that demand radical transformation, without invoking the future existence of a just society. They are antinomian in character, eroding the stability of the status quo. What is more, utopias in Landauer’s sense are essentially dynamic insofar as they stand in a dialectical relationship to topia’s reactionary forces. In strongly rebuffing positive blueprints,

Geuss seeks to associate utopian thinking with particular desires, needs and aspirations that arise from the resistance to specific constellations of power. As a consequence, we end up with a conception of political theory that endeavours to be simultaneously “fully realistic and fully utopian”<sup>46</sup>.

Although Geuss’s sophisticated notion of realism is highly illuminating for our purpose, it also displays two weaknesses. Firstly, Geuss seems largely oblivious to the wide-ranging debate in utopian studies, which has the undeniable effect that his observations on two kinds of utopianism replicate a vital point that has already been made numerous times in a similar fashion. Without wanting to erase the significant differences between them, let us quickly rehearse a few analogous claims: Miguel Abensour speaks of “eternal utopia” as a conservative trope that necessarily entails an appeal to perfect order, which he contrasts with the concept of a “persistent utopia”: the “wish for the advent of a radical alterity here and now”<sup>47</sup>. Russell Jacoby differentiates between the blueprint and the iconoclastic traditions of utopian thinking, discarding the former as potentially authoritarian and commending the latter for its “resistance to representing the future”<sup>48</sup>. Finally, inspired by Ernst Bloch’s magisterial *The Principle of Hope*, Ruth Levitas separates the conventional understanding of utopianism as the “imaginative construction of whole other worlds” from a rival account, which she designates “looking for the blue”<sup>49</sup>, a mindful anticipation of a reconstituted society that is concrete, rather than abstract.

While Geuss’s reluctance to enter into a dialogue with these allied voices is surprising, it does not undermine the gist of his proposal. In fact, we can with relative ease perceive how the debate in utopian studies may speak to the controversy around realism. Even a superficial glance at their positions reveals that Abensour, Jacoby and



Levitas zoom in on exactly the same fault-line that Geuss, too, identifies as the crack through which the falsely unitary image of utopianism can be shattered. We may therefore aver with Abensour, Jacoby and Levitas that, for utopian thinking to establish a place within realist political theory, it must be of the persistent, iconoclastic, “looking for the blue” variety. The blind spot in the dystopic-liberal critique (the Shklar *et al* fallacy) is that it collapses all kinds of utopianism into eternal blueprints of whole other worlds. We can now grasp that this is a caricature of utopian thinking’s diversity.

Yet, there is a second shortcoming, which strikes me as more serious and in need of rectification. Although he gestures, in his essays on Paul Celan’s poetry and Dadaism’s aesthetics, towards the capacity of modern art to foster utopianism of a negative kind<sup>50</sup>, Geuss never engages in earnest with literary utopias to redeem this claim. This is a missed opportunity, for several contemporary writers of utopian fiction have tried to tell stories that exhibit precisely those features that Geuss foregrounds as the critical and antinomian elements of “content-based” utopianism. They trace the fine line between hopeless pessimism and wishful thinking that is characteristic of realist political theory’s radical spirit, shunning the alluring, yet treacherous resolutions of “real utopias” and “dystopic liberalism”. China Miéville, whose oeuvre is paradigmatic of this unorthodox approach to utopian thinking, expresses this view excellently:

If an alternative to this world were inconceivable, how could we change it? But utopia has its limits: utopia can be toxic. We need utopia, but to try to think utopia, in this world, without rage, without fury, is an indulgence we can’t afford. In the face of what is done, we cannot think utopia without hate. Even our ends-of-the-world are too Whiggish. [...] Here instead is to antinomian utopia. A hope that abjures the hope of those in power.<sup>51</sup>

#### IV. *The Dispossessed* as an Ambiguous Utopia

This section unpacks the critical and antinomian features of Ursula K. Le Guin's opus, spelling out in more detail what is involved in emboldening a "hope that abjures the hope of those in power".<sup>52</sup> *The Dispossessed*, originally published in 1974 and immediately awarded the Hugo and Nebula Prizes (the science fiction genre's highest accolades) tells the story of two societies on twin planets: Anarres and Urras. Anarres is inhabited by the descendants of a group of anarcho-syndicalist revolutionaries, who split from Urras during an uprising, which took place approximately 200 years before the story begins.

The inspirational leader behind the uprising was a thinker called Odo, whose philosophy forms the ideological basis of the anarchist society on Anarres. Social ties on Anarres are supposed to facilitate absolute individual liberty without any coercion; there are no laws and no police to uphold public order (although there are therapeutic interventions on individuals who distance themselves too much from Odonianism); no government to issue executive directives; personal property cannot be acquired or sold. Since their planet is desert-like, scarcity of resources is a major challenge to the survival and welfare of the Anarresti. Urras, on the other hand, is divided into several states with separate and competing governments, two of which (A-Io and Thu) play the role of global super-powers. Its material resources are far more copious than Anarres's. The inhabitants of Urras, with the exceptions of a few political renegades, reject the principles of Odonianism and happily embrace wealth and abundance.

Ever since the settlement on Anarres, the members of this anarchic community have entertained only very limited relations with their antagonists. Their main reason to communicate has been for the sake of sending precious minerals to Urras, in exchange

for essential goods that the Anarresti themselves are incapable of producing due to their lack of technological know-how. This trade is viewed with suspicion on both sides: “Seven generations of peace had not brought trust.”<sup>53</sup> The anarcho-syndicalists on Anarres feel highly resentful about their dependency on commerce with the “propertarian” regime on Urras; the Urrasti treat Anarres like a subsidiary mining colony from which precious materials can be extracted.

Against this setting, we encounter an Anarresti scientist called Shevek, who has been tasked with deepening the connections between the two societies. For this purpose, Shevek, an authority in the physics of space travel searching for a “General Temporal Theory”, visits Urras and starts a conversation with the scientists there. The ensuing plot, whose structure alternates between earlier events set on Anarres and later ones set on Urras, narrates the intellectual, personal and political development of Shevek. As an extraordinarily gifted scientist, he runs into serious problems on his home planet. Odonianism teaches all Anarresti to prioritize the needs of the community over individual preferences. This manifest itself not only in their social practices, such as communal child-rearing, but also in their newly engineered language, “Pravic”, which contains no words indicating property or authority.<sup>54</sup> “Egoizing” – the symbolic proclamation of personal possession – is regarded with suspicion on Anarres. From his childhood onwards, Shevek becomes entangled in various incidents that demonstrate his uncomfortable position on Anarres. After a stint in the countryside doing menial community service, he is finally admitted to the Central Institute of Sciences, where his mentor Sabul introduces him to research of physicists from Urras, which later leads to Shevek’s mission visiting the twin planet. Several of Shevek’s

childhood friends express their disgruntlement with the sclerotic nature of Odonian ideology.<sup>55</sup>

On Urras, Shevek's first experiences are by and large rewarding, so much so that he believes to have arrived in an idyllic paradise free from communitarian pressure. Ieu Eun University, where he is to be based, is a fertile ground for scientific endeavours, which contrasts with the atmosphere on Anarres. Soon, however, Shevek becomes aware that his stay on Urras is severely restricted: he can initially only get in touch with other scientists at the University. In the course of his stay, it becomes evident that Shevek's hosts have other motives for inviting him than simply improving relations between the two societies: the "General Temporal Theory" would permit the Urrasti to unlock the secrets of space travel; for them, Shevek is primarily a potential source of arcane knowledge that they themselves cannot master.

Disillusioned by the egotistic and profit-driven motives of his host scientists, Shevek establishes contact with rebel groups on Urras that secretly follow the principles of Odonianism and finally asks for asylum at the Terran embassy. The book ends with Shevek realizing that the rapprochement between Anarres and Urras will not come about as easily as he had envisaged. He returns to his home planet, anticipating to break through the walls that separate Anarres from the rest of the Universe.

Given the wide variety of interpretive engagements with *The Dispossessed*, it is unavoidable to limit our reading to a few key motifs that are especially relevant to the paper's theoretical interest. The first such theme pertains to the specific character of the utopia itself. It has often been observed that the book's subtitle – "An Ambiguous Utopia" – gives away the narrative's main feature. As evidenced by Shevek's assertive and tortured persona, Anarres is not at all portrayed as an unequivocally virtuous,

prosperous or Arcadian place. Rather, it is described as a place riven by contradictions, anxieties and apprehensions. What is more, Le Guin applies a subtle brush to the representation of Urrasti society, too. While Shevek's initial impression of the "propertarians" is enthusiastic, his positive views dramatically deteriorate once he becomes acquainted with his hosts' alienating and shallow lifestyle.

*The Dispossessed's* ambiguity with regard to these alternative worlds is the main reason why the novel has been credited with inaugurating a new strand within the genre: critical utopias deal with

non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the Utopian genre.<sup>56</sup>

Critical utopias are thus alert to the dangers and risks attached to static blueprints of perfect societies. Accordingly, *The Dispossessed* can be said to be critical in at least two different senses: it estranges us from the here and now by conjuring alternative worlds, and at the same time reflexively sheds light on the function of utopian thinking itself. Both its content and its form are critically inflected. As Simon Stow discerns, the effectiveness of this doubly critical thrust "emerges not from simply constructing another world and reading-off the lessons for our own, but rather by traveling between them and using the perspectives gained from evaluating both realities in tandem with the other"<sup>57</sup>.

The metaphor of travelling reflects an understanding of utopian fiction's relation to the real world that we encountered above in Landauer's thoughts on revolutionary agency: insofar as a utopia accumulates all the negative tendencies that a hegemonic order (a *topia*, on Landauer's account) cannot fully absorb, its concrete meaning

materialises out of a struggle with the existing power structures. *The Dispossessed* can therefore be interpreted as having relevance for politics, here and now, to the extent that we accept from the start its necessarily indeterminate impact, mediated by the contradictions, anxieties and apprehensions of our time. Viewed from this angle, it becomes clear how thoroughly Le Guin breaks with the conventions of the traditional utopia. In Laurence Davis's words,

[u]nlike the didactic lessons of the perfectionist utopia, the insights to be gleaned from the Le Guinean utopia are ambiguous. For Le Guin does not tell her readers what to think. Rather, by using her fictional skills to enlarge the field of historical possibility, she challenges us to reevaluate our present from the perspective of the promises of, and aspirations to, emancipation that have not yet been realized.<sup>58</sup>

Le Guin's prose hence exemplifies how storytelling can have a political effect beyond crude didacticism. Avoiding the pitfall of what Geuss calls "form-based utopianism", *The Dispossessed* is a novel of change and transformation. Shevek's physical and intellectual journey from Anarres to Urras and back again, can be read as an invitation to accept the necessarily dynamic character of utopian thinking itself.

The espousal of dialectics can be further teased out by considering the "General Temporal Theory", which Shevek attempts to develop during his trip. Its aim is to offer an account of time that pays equal attention to sequency and simultaneity. That is to say, Shevek's scientific project seeks to capture both the fugitive and the continuous aspects of identity such that being and becoming are each given their due. The "General Temporal Theory" is thus supposed to synthesize contradictory viewpoints about reality into a coherent whole. This goal is mirrored in the "ultimate dialectical unity of the novelistic plot"<sup>59</sup>: towards the end of *The Dispossessed*, the two storylines converge and the narrative circle is closed. The reader thereby comes to

comprehend why Shevek needed to leave Anarres and why he ultimately had to return to his home planet.

Finally, let us note that *The Dispossessed* is undeniably not a dystopia. Although both Anarres and Urras are each deeply flawed societies, Le Guin makes no secret of where her own preferences lie and why she repudiates hopeless pessimism about visions of anarchism. Much has been made of Le Guin's deep and sustained engagement with key authors of the anarchist tradition, such as Kropotkin, Morris and Goldman.<sup>60</sup> It will, then, come as no surprise that at the heart of her depiction of Anarres lies a tension, embodied by Shevek himself, which is pivotal to the very idea of anarchist communism: between the longing for communal solidarity across society and a desire for individual self-fulfilment.<sup>61</sup>

The crucial point here is that *The Dispossessed* probes this tension in all its intricacy, without fatalistically accepting its ultimate destructiveness. Le Guin is adamant about her belief that a harmonization of solidarity and self-fulfilment remains a valuable political objective that can only be approximated through ongoing negotiations of personal freedom and mutual interdependence. This becomes particularly evident in the novel's celebration of the indeterminacy of human action, which contrasts starkly with conventional utopias' insistence on stability and perfection.<sup>62</sup>

*The Dispossessed*, in sum, is anything but the result of wishful thinking. It confronts the immense dangers and risks of social dreaming head-on. Le Guin's own stance towards the book's open, rather than happy ending corroborates this suspicion.<sup>63</sup> Yet, the novel also refuses to extol hopeless pessimism concerning the possibility of radical transformation. With Miéville we might thus conclude that its main commitment is to forcefully preserve a "hope that abjures the hope of those in power". Nurturing such

hope is, paradoxically, premised on abstaining from narratively prescribing its definitive redemption.

## V. “Learning from Other Worlds”: A Primer for Open-Ended Conversations

The paper’s final section further draws out some of the implications that reading *The Dispossessed* might have for the debate around realism in political theory. Le Guin’s novel, or so I have contended, can deliver vital impulses to propel the debate beyond the orbit of the currently dominant *Methodenstreit* between moralists and their detractors. One such impulse simply stems from the attention I have directed towards the genre of literary utopias. Given utopianism’s “three faces” (theory, art and lived experience), it is astonishing how little appreciation political theorists have for fiction writing when they weigh the strengths and weaknesses of utopianism. Contrary to what most participants in this debate seem to believe, utopias are not only a topic for political theory; they also include stories that form a canon of at least 500 years. This uncontentious observation alone should give pause to those who subsume utopianism under such narrow categories as “ideal theory” or “fact-insensitive morality”. The diversity of utopianism thus needs underscoring in a scholarly discussion that has been diminished by an obsession with methodological issues. In that regard, political theorists have much to learn from recent debates in utopian studies.

It goes without saying that Le Guin’s subtle and multifaceted narrative reveals just one auspicious avenue for enlarging the extant controversy around realism. Consider further the following contemporary authors, who are all in some way heirs to *The Dispossessed*: Apart from Miéville’s brand of “weird fiction”<sup>64</sup>, which has already become the object of academic discussion<sup>65</sup>, we could also contemplate Margaret



Atwood's "ustopias"<sup>66</sup> – her distinctive blending of utopia and dystopia. Yet another source of inspiration might be Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy*<sup>67</sup>, which riffs on ideas of radical democracy that have been widely discussed over the past 25 years.<sup>68</sup> What all these writers have to offer to political theory is a unique take on the challenge of productively engaging the imagination such that the structural limitations of our conceptual frameworks become apparent. They prompt us to look differently at "what is, what might be, and the relationship between the two"<sup>69</sup>, without scripting a positive blueprint for a perfect society; neither do they switch to a dystopian perspective, as some of the Cold War liberals would have preferred. Rather, these authors fire up processes of "cognitive estrangement", whereby the present state of affairs is seen from new and startling perspective, enabled by what Darko Suvin calls science fiction's *novum*.<sup>70</sup> Utopias of the critical and antinomian variety hence demand the impossible, yet refrain from bestowing the imaginary world with uniform and monolithic features that would curb their readers' exegetical freedom. Their central feature lies in the "capacity to mediate between [...] the world that is and that which is coming into being."<sup>71</sup>

The best formulation of this dialectics can be discerned in the work of Fredric Jameson, who conceives of utopianism as a formal technique of breaking the spell of the present.<sup>72</sup> For Jameson, utopia's effect of estrangement targets the ideological illusion of the unchangeability of the status quo:

Disruption is, then, the name for a new discursive strategy, and Utopia is the form such disruption necessarily takes. And this is now the temporal situation in which the Utopian form proper [...] has its political role to play, and in fact becomes a new kind of content in its own right. For it is the very principle of the radical break as such, its possibility, which is reinforced by the Utopian form, which insists that its radical difference is possible and that a break is necessary. The Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological

conviction that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system. But it asserts this by forcing us to think the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things would be like after the break.<sup>73</sup>

Importantly, then, utopias have a distinctively negative thrust: they “dissolve” and “neutralize” the world from which they depart.<sup>74</sup> Hence, in his interpretation of *The Dispossessed*, Jameson identifies the novel’s narrative device as “world reduction”<sup>75</sup>. To reduce the world involves an abstraction from the hegemonic constraints of the present day. As the prior section has shown, Shevek’s universe contains plenty examples of such “world reduction”. Recall, for instance, that Anarres is a barren planet, plagued by material scarcity and environmental hazard, which contrasts not only with the overabundance of goods on Urras, but also with the consumerism endemic in late capitalist societies, such as the USA.<sup>76</sup>

Le Guin thus demonstrates that a different universe can be imagined where the prevailing world order is comprehensively unsettled. What we find instead of that order is a fragile social experiment, full of “misfits and oddballs in which the constraints for uniformization and conformity have been removed”<sup>77</sup>. *The Dispossessed* adumbrates a world where individualism and the common good thrive at the same time – not through an enforced harmonization, which would abolish the inherent pluralism of human relations, but through their constant negotiation.

Yet, the fictional dissolution and neutralization of reality hinges on a paradoxical operation, for the utopian desire’s negative drive is by default ideologically imbricated, conditioned and moulded by social conflicts here and now. In his engagement with Adorno’s minimalist notion of utopia as the absence of hunger and violence<sup>78</sup>, Jameson makes this point by underscoring the “inescapable situatedness in class, race and gender, in nationality, in history”<sup>79</sup> of all human beings. Due to this

context-dependence, we are able to detect traces of the status quo in even the most outlandish scenarios depicted in utopias. The disruptive energy of abstraction can hence be channelled by identifying the concrete power structures that imaginary worlds such as Anarres or Urras seek to destabilise. In that sense, Le Guin sketches, to again quote Lawrence Davis, a “grounded utopia” that intensifies

imaginative awareness of neglected or suppressed possibilities for qualitatively better forms of living latent in the present. [...] It does so in part by illuminating the heterodox and the extraordinary in the seemingly ordinary, and by reminding us that past, present, and future all contain multiple possibilities far in excess of seemingly fixed actualities.<sup>80</sup>

This approach to utopian literature reverberates with Geuss’s reflections on the mutually supportive relationship between realism and utopianism. More ambitiously, its formal features can assist us in remedying some of the blind spots in Geuss’s vision. “Learning from other worlds”<sup>81</sup>, then, entails an imaginative undertaking that closely resembles Landauer’s historical reconstruction of the never-ending antagonism between *topia* and *utopia*. If utopias are best understood as contextually specific forms of critique, then we need narratives that employ the device of “world reduction”, without indulging in escapist fantasies. As both Geuss’s reflections and my interpretation of *The Dispossessed* have revealed, only an anchoring of the utopian impulse in the concrete desires, needs and aspirations of individuals and collectives inoculates these visionary strivings against the temptation of wishful thinking.

This last point about the necessary avoidance of escapism is of crucial importance for the argument proposed in this essay. Critical, antinomian utopias disavow wishful thinking, unfolding instead a space in which an oppositional, counter-hegemonic hope can be nurtured. This space is vital to the prospects of a realist political theory

that rejects anti-utopianism. Echoing Geuss's views, Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo succinctly recapitulates this thought when he contends that

realism entails imagination not in order to idealize the present or abstractly posit an ideal situation but to rationally inquire why things are what they are and how they could be otherwise. [...] Precisely because it refuses to relinquish utopia, it [realism] resists any accommodation to the ruling powers, as it relentlessly debunks the quest for silver linings. Instead it highlights power differentials and dispenses with consolations about them.<sup>82</sup>

This passage should not be read as implying that the imagination offers a panacea to all the problems facing realist political theory. The research agenda undergirding the realist project comprises various other instruments, such as ideology critique and genealogy, that cannot be captured in terms of utopianism.<sup>83</sup> However, at a basic level, utopianism and realism sustain and fortify each other insofar as each element of the dyad puts a check on the other's limitations, while at the same time maintaining its distinct identity.

The advantages of this picture emerge once we compare it to the resolutions of "real utopia" and "dystopic liberalism". As stated above, both Wright *et al* and Shklar *et al* appear to distort the complexity of utopian thinking, but for entirely different reasons. Wright *et al* assume that acting in an unjust world necessarily depends on the teleologically assured existence of social initiatives that prefigure ideals of emancipation and progress. Quite possibly against their intentions, the fusing together of realism and utopia thereby undercuts utopianism's full potential by folding its radical impulse into the real world of compromise and concession. Shklar *et al*, on the other side, construe utopianism in much too a restricted fashion, by equating it exclusively with static, perfectionist schemas that allow for no change whatsoever. In so doing, they endeavour to curtail the literary imagination for the

sake of protecting individual autonomy and human plurality against the totalitarian folly of social engineering.

The critical and antinomian utopia, refracted through the theoretical framework of a sober realism, manages to defy both the conservative pull of appeals to “real utopias” and the baseless fear-mongering of “dystopic liberalism”. As I claimed in my analysis of *The Dispossessed*, it is sensible to interpret the novel as a plea for radical transformation, which simultaneously stays faithful to the basic premises of realism. This is the case because Le Guin’s novel remains entwined, in obvious and less obvious ways, with the world it seeks to negate and dissolve. By defamiliarizing us from the status quo, utopias can hence induce the kind of split from reality that makes an informed understanding of, and critical engagement with, the world possible.

Terry Eagleton speaks to this issue when he observes that

[i]f the notion of utopia is to have force, it could only be as a way of interrogating the present which unlocks its dominative logic by discerning the dim outline of an alternative already implicit within it. [...] Authentic utopian thought concerns itself with that which is encoded within the logic of a system which, extrapolated in a certain direction, has the power to undo it.<sup>84</sup>

In conclusion, this essay has argued that *The Dispossessed* is emblematic of a wider range of utopian fiction, which grants political theory more than simply a steady supply of innovative replies to old problems, such as, for example, the friction between a longing for communal solidarity across society and a desire for individual self-fulfilment. Rather, the critical and antinomian utopia affords us, more profoundly, with another way of seeing that remains stably anchored, due to its ambiguity and dynamism, in the here and now. Le Guin and other authors of utopian fiction therefore convey to us what at this point in time, where the very idea of alternatives is routinely denied, seems most indispensable: new questions, rather than

novel answers. This is precisely why realists would be well advised to forsake their pessimism about human nature, brush off the charge of conservatism and commence taking the imagination, in all its dimensions, seriously.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 98.

<sup>2</sup> *Pacific Edge, Three Californias* (New York: Orb, 1995), 95.

<sup>3</sup> "'We Are All Thomas More's Children'— 500 Years of Utopia," *The Guardian*, November 4, 2016, sec. Books, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/04/thomas-more-utopia-500-years-china-mieville-ursula-le-guin>.

<sup>4</sup> This is obviously not to say that all contemporary engagements with the realism-utopia nexus are unproductive. For two papers that seem to be animated by a similar spirit, yet pursue different routes, see: Paul Raekstad, "Realism, Utopianism, and Radical Values," *European Journal of Philosophy*, January 1, 2016, 1–24, doi:10.1111/ejop.12193 [online first publication]; Benjamin L. McKean, "What Makes a Utopia Inconvenient? On the Advantages and Disadvantages of a Realist Orientation to Politics," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 4 (November 2016): 876–88, doi:10.1017/S0003055416000460.

<sup>5</sup> See: Enzo Rossi, "Can Realism Move Beyond a Methodenstreit?," *Political Theory* 44, no. 3 (June 1, 2016): 410–20, doi:10.1177/0090591715621507.

<sup>6</sup> Utopia's critical purchase resides precisely in the interplay between these two semantic layers. See: Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, trans. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 16; Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial*



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*Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath, *Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 1984), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, a prominent figure in the field of utopian studies, points out that utopianism has always contained “three faces”: literature (such as the texts constituting the utopian and dystopian canon), communitarianism (meaning here actual experiments in establishing communal spaces that break with conventional arrangements) and political theory (the area to which this paper contributes). See: Lyman Tower Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 1–37.

<sup>8</sup> Amongst others, Lucy Sargisson has suggested that many different practices can be portrayed as utopian in this sense, from climate change activism to co-housing initiatives and online gaming. According to this line of reasoning, utopias are as much about being and acting in this world, as they are about imagining and pondering other worlds. While it would certainly be worthwhile to untangle the web of influences between all three faces of utopianism, the paper’s scope is circumscribed by my principal interest in realist political theory’s contentious relationship with utopia. See: Lucy Sargisson, *Fool’s Gold? Utopianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). See also: Davina Cooper, *Everyday Utopias: The Conceptual Life of Promising Spaces* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Space constraints prevent me from delineating the underlying controversy in its full complexity. For two milestones in the debate see: Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). For a more comprehensive

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overview see: Matt Sleat, *Liberal Realism: A Realist Theory of Liberal Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> William A. Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (2010): 394, doi:10.1177/1474885110374001.

<sup>11</sup> David Estlund, "Utopophobia," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 2 (March 1, 2014): 113–34, doi:10.1111/papa.12031.

<sup>12</sup> Pablo Gilabert and Holly Lawford-Smith, "Political Feasibility: A Conceptual Exploration," *Political Studies* 60, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 815, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00936.x.

<sup>13</sup> Another point of departure for reconstructing recent attempts to reconcile realism with utopianism would be John Rawls's concept of a "realistic utopia". See: John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples; with, The Idea of Public Reason Revisited* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 6. For a critical discussion, which resonates with some of the arguments I raise against Wright, see: Marit Böker, "The Concept of Realistic Utopia: Ideal Theory as Critique," *Constellations* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 89–100, doi:10.1111/1467-8675.12183.

<sup>14</sup> Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London/New York: Verso, 2010), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Erik Olin Wright, "Transforming Capitalism through Real Utopias," *American Sociological Review* 78, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 1–25, doi:10.1177/0003122412468882.

<sup>16</sup> Erik Olin Wright, "How to Be an Anticapitalist Today," *Jacobin*, December 2, 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/12/erik-olin-wright-real-utopias-anticapitalism-democracy/>.

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<sup>17</sup> Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, chap. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Kinna, "Utopianism and Prefiguration," in *Political Uses of Utopia: New Marxist, Anarchist, and Radical Democratic Perspectives*, ed. S. D. Chrostowska and James D. Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 198–215.

<sup>20</sup> Note, though, that by focusing mostly on Shklar's late work, I am sketching a simplified version of the full story. As Katrina Forrester has demonstrated, Shklar's account of utopianism is more variegated than usually suspected. However, for presentational reasons it seems appropriate to foreground Shklar's anti-utopianism in this context. For it is surely true that Shklar and other Cold War liberals strongly influenced the dominant perception of realism as anti-utopian. See: Katrina Forrester, "Hope and Memory in the Thought of Judith Shklar," *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 3 (November 2011): 591–620, doi:10.1017/S1479244311000369.

<sup>21</sup> See: Jan-Werner Müller, "Fear and Freedom: On 'Cold War Liberalism,'" *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no. 1 (2008): 45–64, doi:10.1177/1474885107083403.

<sup>22</sup> Judith Shklar, "Liberalism of Fear," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>23</sup> George Kateb, "Foreword," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, by Judith Shklar, ed. Stanley Hoffmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), viii.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Shorten, *Modernism and Totalitarianism: Rethinking the Intellectual Sources of Nazism and Stalinism, 1945 to the Present* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 109–23.

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<sup>25</sup> In later years, French thinkers such as François Furet, Marcel Gauchet, Claude Lefort and other members of the Aronian circle would continue this line of argumentation by developing anti-totalitarian accounts of the perils of revolution. On this debate see: Stephen W. Sawyer and Iain Stewart, eds., *In Search of the Liberal Moment: Democracy, Anti-Totalitarianism, and Intellectual Politics in France since 1950* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Karl Popper, "Utopia and Violence," *World Affairs* 149, no. 1 (1986): 3–9; Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2011), vol. 1, chap. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Shklar, "Obligation, Loyalty, Exile," *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (May 1993): 181.

<sup>28</sup> See: Nicholas Rengger, "Realism Tamed or Liberalism Betrayed? Dystopic Liberalism and the International Order," in *After Liberalism?*, ed. Rebekka Friedman, Kevork Oskanian, and Ramon Pacheco Pardo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 51–66.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Claeys, "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell," in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 109.

<sup>30</sup> John Horton, "Realism, Liberal Moralism and a Political Theory of Modus Vivendi," *European Journal of Political Theory* 9, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 431–48, doi:10.1177/1474885110374004.

<sup>31</sup> Craig Borowiak, "Scaling up Utopias: E.O. Wright and the Search for Economic Alternatives," *New Political Science* 34, no. 3 (2012): 364, doi:10.1080/07393148.2012.703856; Dylan Riley, "An Anticapitalism That Can Win,"

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*Jacobin*, July 1, 2016, <http://jacobinmag.com/2016/01/olin-wright-real-utopias-socialism-capitalism-gramsci-lenin-luxemburg/>.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Shorten, "Rethinking Totalitarian Ideology: Insights from the Anti-Totalitarian Canon," *History of Political Thought* 36, no. 4 (2015): 726–61.

<sup>33</sup> On this issue see: Mark Philp, "Realism without Illusions," *Political Theory* 40, no. 5 (2012): 636, doi:10.1177/0090591712451723.

<sup>34</sup> "Suffering and Knowledge in Adorno," in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 128.

<sup>35</sup> On the complex ways in which Geuss's critique of moralism remains indebted to Adorno, see: Christoph Menke, "Neither Rawls Nor Adorno: Raymond Geuss' Programme for a 'Realist' Political Philosophy," *European Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 139–47, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0378.2010.00394.x.

<sup>36</sup> Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Geuss, "Realism, Wishful Thinking, Utopia," in *Political Uses of Utopia: New Marxist, Anarchist, and Radical Democratic Perspectives*, ed. S. D. Chrostowska and James D. Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 241, 245.

<sup>38</sup> See: Lorna Finlayson, "With Radicals Like These, Who Needs Conservatives? Doom, Gloom, and Realism in Political Theory," *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2015, 1474885114568815, doi:10.1177/1474885114568815; Janosch Prinz, "Raymond Geuss' Radicalization of Realism in Political Theory," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 42, no. 8 (2016): 777–96, doi:10.1177/0191453715583711.

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<sup>39</sup> “Realism and the Relativity of Judgement,” *International Relations* 29, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 3–22, doi:10.1177/0047117815569517.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>44</sup> Gustav Landauer, “Revolution,” in *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Kuhn (Oakland: Merlin Press, 2010), 113.

<sup>45</sup> “The Metaphysical Need and the Utopian Impulse,” in *Actions, Reasons and Reason*, ed. Marco Iorio and Ralf Stoecker (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 155.

<sup>46</sup> David Edmonds and Nigel Warburton, *Raymond Geuss on Realism and Utopianism in Political Philosophy*, Philosophy Bites Podcast, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://philosophybites.com/2010/05/raymond-geuss-on-realism-in-political-philosophy.html>.

<sup>47</sup> “Persistent Utopia,” *Constellations* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 407, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8675.2008.00501.x.

<sup>48</sup> *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), xvii.

<sup>49</sup> “Looking for the Blue: The Necessity of Utopia,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 3 (2007): 291, doi:10.1080/13569310701622184.

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<sup>50</sup> “Celan’s Meridian,” in *Politics and the Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 117–41; “The Radioactive Wolf, Pieing, and the Goddess Fashion,” in *Reality and Its Dreams* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 226–52.

<sup>51</sup> “The Limits of Utopia,” *Salvage*, 2015, 189. I have borrowed the title for this essay from this passage.

<sup>52</sup> In this ambition, the paper follows the lead of recent attempts to mine Le Guin’s opus for insights relevant to political theory. See: Tony Burns, *Political Theory, Science Fiction, and Utopian Literature: Ursula K. Le Guin and the Dispossessed* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008); Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman, eds., *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin’s The Dispossessed* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: A Novel*, ePub Edition (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), para. 2628.

<sup>54</sup> See: *Ibid.*, para. 2629.

<sup>55</sup> See: *Ibid.*, paras. 21058, 21060.

<sup>56</sup> Sargent, “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” 9.

<sup>57</sup> “Worlds Apart: Ursula K. Le Guin and the Possibility of Method,” in *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin’s The Dispossessed*, ed. Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 48.

<sup>58</sup> “The Dynamic and Revolutionary Utopia of Ursula K. Le Guin,” in *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin’s The Dispossessed*, ed. Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 24–25.

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<sup>59</sup> Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 113.

<sup>60</sup> Lewis Call, "Postmodern Anarchism in the Novels of Ursula K. Le Guin," *SubStance* 36, no. 2 (August 13, 2007): 87–105, doi:10.1353/sub.2007.0028. On the interdependencies between anarchism and utopianism, see the essays in: Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna, eds., *Anarchism and Utopianism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Sabia, "Utopia as Critique," *Peace Review* 14, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 191–97, doi:10.1080/10402650220140229.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Stillman, "The Dispossessed as Ecological Political Theory," in *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed*, ed. Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 64.

<sup>63</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, "A Response, by Ansible, from Tau Ceti," in *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed*, ed. Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 308.

<sup>64</sup> *The City & the City* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009); *Embassytown* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2011); *Railsea* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Carl Freedman, "Speculative Fiction and International Law: The Marxism of China Miéville," *Socialism and Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2006): 25–39, doi:10.1080/08854300600950228.

<sup>66</sup> *The Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986); *Oryx and Crake* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2003); *The Year of the Flood* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2009); *MaddAddam* (Nan A. Talese, 2013). On Atwood's critical dystopianism see: Gerry



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Canavan, "Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 23, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 138–59, doi:10.1080/10436928.2012.676914.

<sup>67</sup> *Red Mars* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993); *Green Mars* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994); *Blue Mars* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996).

<sup>68</sup> William J. Burling, "The Theoretical Foundation of Utopian Radical Democracy in Kim Stanley Robinson's *Blue Mars*," *Utopian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2005): 75–96; Fredric Jameson, "'If I Find One Good City I Will Spare the Man': Realism and Utopia in Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy*," in *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, ed. Patrick Parrinder, Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies 17 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 208–32.

<sup>69</sup> Laurence Davis, "History, Politics, and Utopia: Toward a Synthesis of Social Theory and Practice," in *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought*, ed. Patricia I. Vieira and Michael Marder (New York: Continuum, 2012), 137.

<sup>70</sup> "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," *College English* 34, no. 3 (1972): 372–82, doi:10.2307/375141. On Suvin see: Gregory Renault, "Science Fiction as Cognitive Estrangement: Darko Suvin and the Marxist Critique of Mass Culture," *Discourse* 2 (1980): 113–41; Simon Spiegel, "Things Made Strange: On the Concept of 'Estrangement' in Science Fiction Theory," *Science Fiction Studies* 35, no. 3 (2008): 369–85.

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<sup>71</sup> Phillip E. Wegner, "Horizons, Figures, and Machines: The Dialectic of Utopia in the Work of Fredric Jameson," *Utopian Studies* 9, no. 2 (1998): 64.

<sup>72</sup> For a collection of Jameson's writings on utopianism from the past 30 years see: Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005). On the development of Jameson's reflections on this topic see: Peter Fitting, "The Concept of Utopia in the Work of Fredric Jameson," *Utopian Studies* 9, no. 2 (1998): 8-17.

<sup>73</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 231-32.

<sup>74</sup> See: Fredric Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse," *Diacritics* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 2-21.

<sup>75</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 271.

<sup>76</sup> Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 174.

<sup>77</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*, Radical Thinkers 18 (London: Verso, 2007), 102.

<sup>78</sup> See: Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, Radical Thinkers (London/New York: Verso, 2005), 157.

<sup>79</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 170.

<sup>80</sup> Davis, "History, Politics, and Utopia: Toward a Synthesis of Social Theory and Practice," 136.

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<sup>81</sup> Patrick Parrinder, ed., *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia*, Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies 17 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, *Political Responsibility: Responding to Predicaments of Power*, New Directions in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 255.

<sup>83</sup> Geuss, "Realism, Wishful Thinking, Utopia," 243.

<sup>84</sup> Terry Eagleton, "Utopia and Its Opposites," *Socialist Register* 36 (2000): 34.